



2023 Annual Report

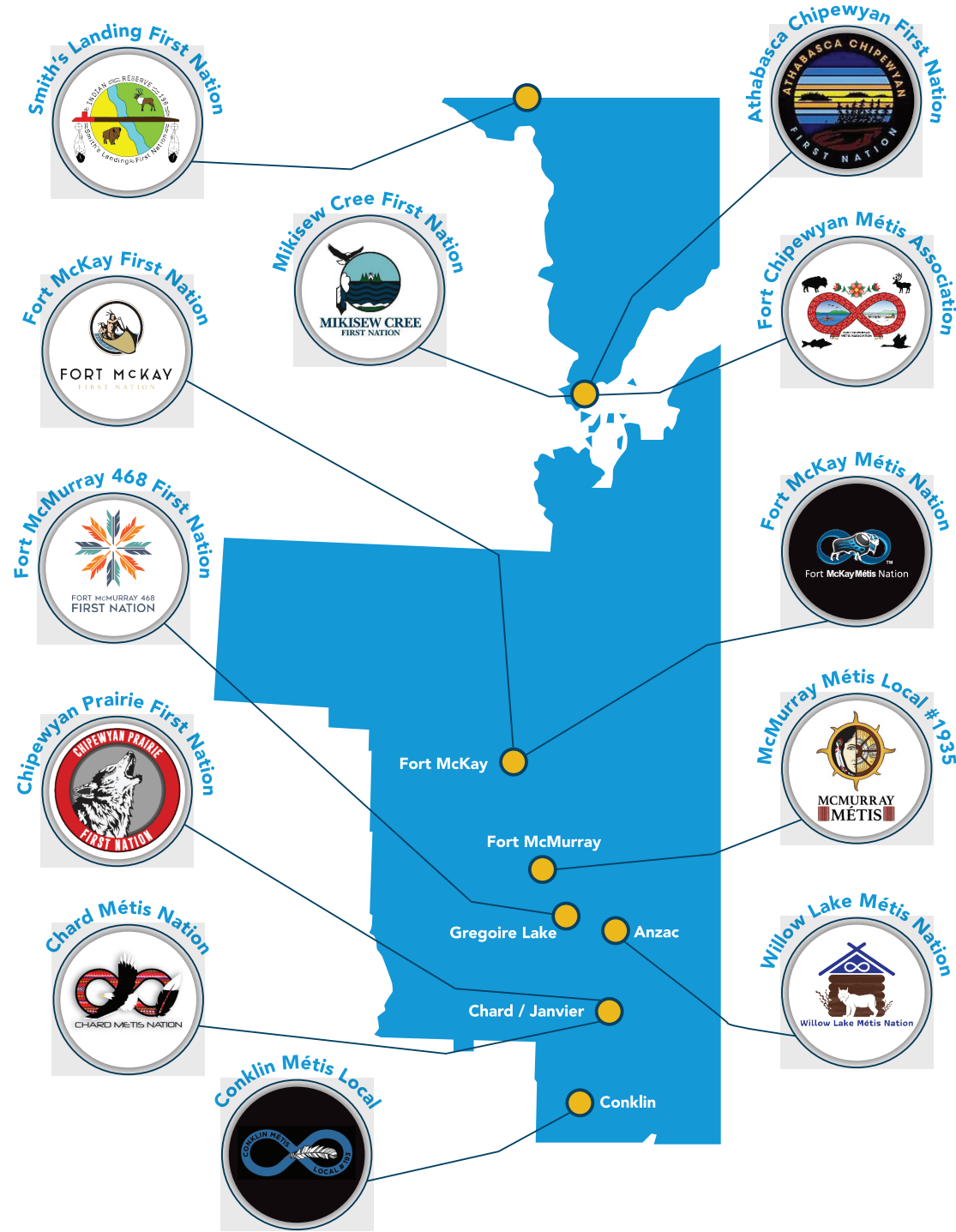
MUNICIPAL RESPONSE TO TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION CALLS TO ACTION

Responding to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action:
Principles for a Collaborative Pathway Forward in Wood Buffalo



REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY
OF WOOD BUFFALO

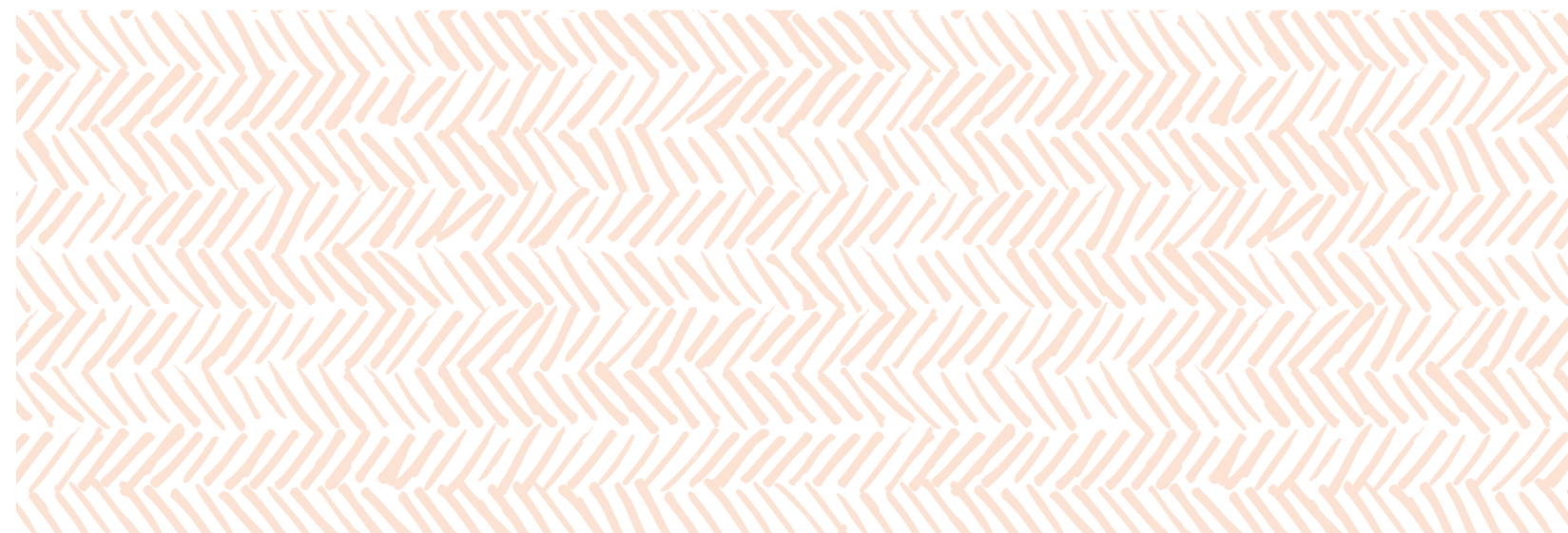
LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT



With gratitude, the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo acknowledges this land is Treaty 8 Territory, the traditional lands of the Cree, Dene, and the unceded territory of the Métis people.

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ON THE COVER

About the Cover Art: *True North* by Frederick R. McDonald

In this artwork, Elders drum while three generations of women dance. The animals in the sky represent the Seven Sacred Teachings: love (Eagle), honesty (Raven), humility (Wolf), courage (Bear), wisdom (Beaver), truth (Turtle), and respect (Bison). The symbols in the ground that we stand on form a narrative of our past. They reference (left to right) how we lived off and with the land and the animals, how the residential institutions of the governments and churches came along, ripping apart our families, eventually leading us all here to our search for self and re-discovery of who we are as a people. With the help of Aboriginal spirituality, today we live strong in our communities, and we celebrate all the things that make us who we are with old traditions, along with the help of newly adapted cultural experiences.

About the Artist: Frederick R. McDonald



Frederick R. McDonald is an artist and a member of the Fort McKay First Nation. Frederick followed his dream to be an artist by attending the University of Calgary, graduating with a Master of Fine Arts degree in 2001. While in university, he took on many challenges such as President of the First Nations Student Association, and by participating in other organizations like the Rainforest Action Group and the Committee Against Racism, giving him insights to different ways of seeing.

Frederick was born in Fort McMurray and raised in the bush along the Athabasca River and was brought up in the traditional hunting and trapping lifestyle of his parents. A way of life that still lives inside him.

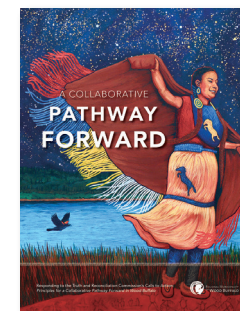
Despite traveling all over the world, Fred's heart is still with his community. He's had many roles over the years and found personal satisfaction as the Fort McKay Treaty Days coordinator and as the Athabasca Tribal Council Regional Gathering director. Always a leader, Fred served as the President of the Northern Alberta Aboriginal Business Association and has also had many board appointments including the Fort McMurray United Way.

As the CEO of the Fort McKay Group of Companies for four years, beginning this posting in 2008, he learned how to use his left brain more efficiently and says he saw firsthand how the corporate environment dynamics work. This adds another level of thinking when it comes to artistic perspectives.

Fred has returned to being an artist; it's where his heart has always been. He has had many exhibitions across Canada and has been collected by individuals and corporations from all parts of the world, including many institutions like the Glenbow Museum, The Alberta Arts Foundation, and the Government of Canada.

Fred loves painting but has also taken to poetry and photography equally. Being an artist, he says, he has an esoteric relationship with the cosmos, but mainly...art is life!

ABOUT THE 2023 ANNUAL REPORT



In 2021, the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo (the Municipality) issued *A Collaborative Pathway Forward*, its response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's (TRC) Calls to Action. Using the TRC's 94 Calls to Action as a roadmap, the report was the formal foundation for the Municipality's efforts and initiatives to reconcile and renew relationships with Indigenous Peoples and communities in Wood Buffalo. The Municipality has committed to providing annual updates on its progress, with successive reports every four years, aligned with Council terms of office.

Following the 2022 Annual Update and respective presentation to Council, the Municipality has adopted 30 Calls to Action that it could either act on or influence through collaboration or advocacy. The identified Calls to Action can be found on page 6, while the complete list of the TRC's 94 Calls to Action can be found on the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation's website (nctr.ca).

Please refer to *A Collaborative Pathway Forward* for a note on terminology, as well as more comprehensive information about the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, Indian Residential Schools, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), and a detailed timeline of the Municipality's ongoing response to truth and reconciliation.



MESSAGE FROM DENNIS FRASER, DIRECTOR OF INDIGENOUS AND RURAL RELATIONS

tansi, edlanete, Hello. I am pleased to present the second annual update to *A Collaborative Pathway Forward*, the Municipality's response to the TRC's Calls to Action. It was another productive year for the Indigenous and Rural Relations (IRR) department, and the organization at large. Over this past year, the Municipality was able to demonstrate its ability to innovate and be creative, as well as its capacity to be responsive to emerging issues.

In terms of innovation, we saw the creation of the Truth and Reconciliation Champions, a cross-departmental working group that brings leaders and innovators together to address truth and reconciliation from an organizational perspective. This has been a long-time vision of IRR, and a specific goal identified in the 2022 Annual Update. We have learned that true reconciliation can only happen when individuals commit personally, and the Municipality commits fully. The Champions, who truly live up to their name, are helping us actualize reconciliation at an organizational level.

Though successes were seen with the development of the Champions working group, IRR responded to many emerging matters in 2023. While going through difficult

situations can be challenging, they can serve to highlight the need for deep change and wider organizational participation. For example, the evacuation of Fort Chipewyan in June 2023 saw people from all departments being called upon to help. The support and involvement of Council and staff was vital to achieve the objectives outlined by the Calls to Action. Examples of this include supporting the Regional Emergency Coordination Centre (RECC), Emergency Social Services (ESS) checking in hundreds of evacuees, the emergency response team, and the team who created a safe, culturally appropriate space for Elders at the Snye. All this work led us in the right direction, towards an organization that is becoming progressively more inclusive and equitable.

I feel a deep sense of pride and gratitude for the work that has been done by the IRR team and the many employees across the organization. Though there is still much work to do, we continue to strive to break down barriers for positive change in the region.

kinanâskomitin, marsi cho, Thank you,

Dennis Fraser

ADOPTED CALLS TO ACTION

1. We call upon the federal, provincial, territorial, and Aboriginal governments to commit to reducing the number of Aboriginal children in care by:
 - i. Monitoring and assessing neglect investigations.
 - ii. Providing adequate resources to enable Aboriginal communities and child-welfare organizations to keep Aboriginal families together where it is safe to do so, and to keep children in culturally appropriate environments, regardless of where they reside.
 - iii. Ensuring that social workers and others who conduct child-welfare investigations are properly educated and trained about the history and impacts of residential schools.
 - iv. Ensuring that social workers and others who conduct child-welfare investigations are properly educated and trained about the potential for Aboriginal communities and families to provide more appropriate solutions to family healing.
 - v. Requiring that all child-welfare decision makers consider the impact of the residential school.
3. We call upon all levels of government to fully implement Jordan's Principle.
5. We call upon the federal, provincial, territorial, and Aboriginal governments to develop culturally appropriate parenting programs for Aboriginal families.
7. We call upon the federal government to develop with Aboriginal groups a joint strategy to eliminate educational and employment gaps between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians.
8. We call upon the federal government to eliminate the discrepancy in federal education funding for First Nations children being educated on reserves and those First Nations children being educated off reserves.
11. We call upon the federal government to provide adequate funding to end the backlog of First Nations students seeking a post-secondary education.
12. We call upon the federal, provincial, territorial, and Aboriginal governments to develop culturally appropriate early childhood education programs for Aboriginal families.
13. We call upon the federal government to acknowledge that Aboriginal rights include Aboriginal language rights.
14. We call upon the federal government to enact an Aboriginal Languages Act that incorporates the following principles:
 - i. Aboriginal languages are a fundamental and valued element of Canadian culture and society, and there is an urgency to preserve them.
 - ii. Aboriginal language rights are reinforced by the Treaties.
 - iii. The federal government has a responsibility to provide sufficient funds for Aboriginal-language revitalization and preservation.
 - iv. The preservation, revitalization, and strengthening of Aboriginal languages and cultures are best managed by Aboriginal people and communities.
 - v. Funding for Aboriginal language initiatives must reflect the diversity of Aboriginal languages.
16. We call upon post-secondary institutions to create university and college degree and diploma programs in Aboriginal languages.
17. We call upon all levels of government to enable residential school Survivors and their families to reclaim names changed by the residential school system by waiving administrative costs for a period of five years for the name-change process and the revision of official identity documents, such as birth certificates, passports, driver's licenses, health cards, status cards, and social insurance numbers.
22. We call upon those who can effect change within the Canadian health-care system to recognize the value of Aboriginal healing practices and use them in the treatment of Aboriginal patients in collaboration with Aboriginal healers and Elders where requested by Aboriginal patients.
23. We call upon all levels of government to:
 - i. Increase the number of Aboriginal professionals working in the health-care field.
 - ii. Ensure the retention of Aboriginal health-care providers in Aboriginal communities.
 - iii. Provide cultural competency training for all health-care professionals.
31. We call upon the federal, provincial, and territorial governments to provide sufficient and stable funding to implement and evaluate community sanctions that will provide realistic alternatives to imprisonment for Aboriginal offenders and respond to the underlying causes of offending.
40. We call on all levels of government, in collaboration with Aboriginal people, to create adequately funded and accessible Aboriginal-specific victim programs and services with appropriate evaluation mechanisms.
43. We call upon federal, provincial, territorial, and municipal governments to fully adopt and implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as the framework for reconciliation.
47. We call upon federal, provincial, territorial, and municipal governments to repudiate concepts used to justify European sovereignty over Indigenous peoples and lands, such as the Doctrine of Discovery and terra nullius, and to reform those laws, government policies, and litigation strategies that continue to rely on such concepts.
53. We call upon the Parliament of Canada, in consultation and collaboration with Aboriginal peoples, to enact legislation to establish a National Council for Reconciliation. The legislation would establish the council as an independent, national, oversight body with membership jointly appointed by the Government of Canada and national Aboriginal organizations, and consisting of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal members. Its mandate would include, but not be limited to, the following:
 - i. Monitor, evaluate, and report annually to Parliament and the people of Canada on the Government of Canada's post-apology progress on reconciliation to ensure that government accountability for reconciling the relationship between Aboriginal peoples and the Crown is maintained in the coming years.
 - ii. Monitor, evaluate, and report to Parliament and the people of Canada on reconciliation progress across all levels and sectors of Canadian society, including the implementation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Calls to Action.
 - iii. Develop and implement a multi-year National Action Plan for Reconciliation, which includes research and policy development, public education programs, and resources.
 - iv. Promote public dialogue, public/private partnerships, and public initiatives for reconciliation.

55. We call upon all levels of government to provide annual reports or any current data requested by the National Council for Reconciliation so that it can report on the progress towards reconciliation. The reports or data would include, but not be limited to:
- i. The number of Aboriginal children—including Métis and Inuit children—in care, compared with non-Aboriginal children, the reasons for apprehension, and the total spending on preventive and care services by child-welfare agencies.
 - ii. Comparative funding for the education of First Nations children on and off reserves.
 - iii. The educational and income attainments of Aboriginal peoples in Canada compared with non-Aboriginal people.
 - iv. Progress on closing the gaps between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities in a number of health indicators such as: infant mortality, maternal health, suicide, mental health, addictions, life expectancy, birth rates, infant and child health issues, chronic diseases, illness and injury incidence, and the availability of appropriate health services.
 - v. Progress on eliminating the overrepresentation of Aboriginal children in youth custody over the next decade.
 - vi. Progress on reducing the rate of criminal victimization of Aboriginal people, including data related to homicide and family violence victimization and other crimes.
 - vii. Progress on reducing the overrepresentation of Aboriginal people in the justice and correctional systems.
57. We call upon federal, provincial, territorial, and municipal governments to provide education to public servants on the history of Aboriginal peoples, including the history and legacy of residential schools, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Treaties and Aboriginal rights, Indigenous law, and Aboriginal–Crown relations. This will require skills-based training in intercultural competency, conflict resolution, human rights, and anti-racism.
64. We call upon all levels of government that provide public funds to denominational schools to require such schools to provide an education on comparative religious studies, which must include a segment on Aboriginal spiritual beliefs and practices developed in collaboration with Aboriginal Elders.
66. We call upon the federal government to establish multiyear funding for community-based youth organizations to deliver programs on reconciliation and establish a national network to share information and best practices.
75. We call upon the federal government to work with provincial, territorial, and municipal governments, churches, Aboriginal communities, former residential school students, and current landowners to develop and implement strategies and procedures for the ongoing identification, documentation, maintenance, commemoration, and protection of residential school cemeteries or other sites at which residential school children were buried. This is to include the provision of appropriate memorial ceremonies and commemorative markers to honour the deceased children.
77. We call upon provincial, territorial, municipal, and community archives to work collaboratively with the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation to identify and collect copies of all records relevant to the history and legacy of the residential school system, and to provide these to the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation.

79. We call upon the federal government, in collaboration with Survivors, Aboriginal organizations, and the arts community, to develop a reconciliation framework for Canadian heritage and commemoration. This would include, but not be limited to:
- i. Amending the Historic Sites and Monuments Act to include First Nations, Inuit, and Métis representation on the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada and its Secretariat.
 - ii. Revising the policies, criteria, and practices of the National Program of Historical Commemoration to integrate Indigenous history, heritage values, and memory practices into Canada’s national heritage and history.
 - iii. Developing and implementing a national heritage plan and strategy for commemorating residential school sites, the history and legacy of residential schools, and the contributions of Aboriginal peoples to Canada’s history.
82. We call upon provincial and territorial governments, in collaboration with Survivors and their organizations, and other parties to the Settlement Agreement, to commission and install a publicly accessible, highly visible, Residential Schools Monument in each capital city to honour Survivors and all the children who were lost to their families and communities.
87. We call upon all levels of government, in collaboration with Aboriginal peoples, sports halls of fame, and other relevant organizations, to provide public education that tells the national story of Aboriginal athletes in history.
88. We call upon all levels of government to take action to ensure long-term Aboriginal athlete development and growth, and continued support for the North American Indigenous Games, including funding to host the games and for provincial and territorial team preparation and travel.
91. We call upon the officials and host countries of international sporting events such as the Olympics, Pan Am, and Commonwealth games to ensure that Indigenous peoples’ territorial protocols are respected, and local Indigenous communities are engaged in all aspects of planning and participating in such events
92. We call upon the corporate sector in Canada to adopt the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as a reconciliation framework and to apply its principles, norms, and standards to corporate policy and core operational activities involving Indigenous peoples and their lands and resources. This would include, but not be limited to, the following:
- i. Commit to meaningful consultation, building respectful relationships, and obtaining the free, prior, and informed consent of Indigenous peoples before proceeding with economic development projects.
 - ii. Ensure that Aboriginal peoples have equitable access to jobs, training, and education opportunities in the corporate sector, and that Aboriginal communities gain long-term sustainable benefits from economic development projects.
 - iii. Provide education for management and staff on the history of Aboriginal peoples, including the history and legacy of residential schools, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Treaties and Aboriginal rights, Indigenous law, and Aboriginal-Crown relations. This will require skills-based training in intercultural competency, conflict resolution, human rights, and anti-racism.

ANNUAL UPDATE

Following *A Collaborative Pathway Forward*, the Municipality remains committed to advancing truth and reconciliation through the 30 Calls to Action that have been adopted to date from the TRC's 94 Calls to Action. This section summarizes and highlights the progress made in 2023.

Calls to Action 13, 14, 16, and 17 (Language and Culture)

Calls to Action 13, 14, 16, and 17 emphasize the importance of revitalizing Indigenous languages, specifically Cree and Dene, in order to preserve cultural heritage and move forward on the path to reconciliation. These calls to action recognize that language is key to maintaining a strong cultural identity and connection to traditional knowledge. Revitalizing Cree and Dene languages is crucial for fostering intergenerational healing, restoring pride and self-esteem among Indigenous communities, and promoting a deeper understanding of the historical and ongoing impacts of colonization. By preserving and promoting these languages, we not only honour the resilience and richness of Indigenous cultures, but also pave the way for a more inclusive and equitable society where Indigenous voices are heard and valued. Language revitalization plays a pivotal role in building bridges between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Peoples, fostering mutual understanding, and working towards a shared future rooted in truth, respect, and reconciliation.

National Indigenous Languages Day Supported by RMWB with Mikisew Cree First Nation | March 31, 2023

The RMWB supported with the hosting of a National Indigenous Languages Day event in Fort Chipewyan on March 31, 2023. This presented a powerful opportunity to support the Calls to Action relevant to language and culture. The event focused on celebrating and promoting the revitalization of Cree and Dene languages, and served as a platform to showcase the beauty, resilience, and importance of local Indigenous languages, fostering a sense of pride and cultural continuity within the community. Through interactive language workshops, storytelling sessions, and engaging discussions, those

in attendance were encouraged to actively participate in preserving Cree and Dene languages. By bringing together community members, educators, Elders, and youth to honour and uplift Indigenous languages, this event was intended to contribute to healing intergenerational trauma, strengthening cultural identity, and advancing the journey towards truth and reconciliation in a meaningful and impactful way.

Events like the celebration in Fort Chipewyan, align closely with the goals and objectives of the International Decade for Indigenous Languages (2019-2028). The Decade, declared via proclamation by the Municipality on February 25, 2020, aims to raise awareness about the critical status of many Indigenous languages around the world and mobilize efforts to preserve, revitalize, and promote these languages within their respective communities. By hosting events that highlight the importance of Indigenous languages, communities actively contribute to the goals of the Decade by showcasing the importance of language, fostering intergenerational transmission, and encouraging linguistic diversity and preservation. These events provide a platform for sharing knowledge, best practices, and strategies for language revitalization, ultimately contributing to global efforts to protect and promote Indigenous languages for future generations.

Calls to Action 31 and 40 (Justice)

MMEIP Taskforce

Call to Action 40 calls on all levels of government, in collaboration with Indigenous Peoples, to create adequately funded and accessible Indigenous-specific victim programs and services. This year saw Council and Administration continue its response to Missing or Murdered and Exploited Indigenous Peoples (MMEIP). To advance the Municipality's response to MMEIP as highlighted in Council's 2022 - 2025 Strategic

Plan, the Municipality once again supported funding to co-create, deliver, and disseminate prevention programs, education, and awareness campaigns in partnership with Indigenous Peoples. This is being done to advance the Calls to Justice identified within the final report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. These efforts also included work with local Indigenous partners, organizations, and experts to continue the implementation of a local action plan that was inclusive of MMEIP.

Building on the efforts that began in February 2022, the MMEIP Taskforce continued to work collectively to respond to the violence inflicted on local Indigenous Peoples and end the discriminatory response from broad sectors within the community. Initially composed of local grassroots Indigenous women advocates, the Taskforce expanded to include impactful community members to support the work required to end violence and create safe and supportive communities. The Taskforce identified four areas of critical impact which included support, prevention, response, and capacity. All the efforts undertaken were aimed at addressing these areas comprehensively, ensuring a holistic approach to tackling challenges and promoting resilience within the community.

MMEIP Focused Initiatives

Honour & Remember – Gallery Exhibit by Jes Croucher

Opening on February 23, 2023, the gallery exhibit titled Honour & Remember was unveiled in the lobby of the Jubilee municipal building. Honour & Remember is a group exhibition acknowledging Indigenous Peoples who have been lost to the epidemic of Missing or Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people (MMIWG2S+). The exhibition acknowledges MMEIP on Turtle Island (North America), and is also specific to Canada and the region of Wood Buffalo. The goal of the exhibition was to tell a visual story

of the ongoing impacts of colonial violence against Indigenous Peoples through traditional and contemporary mediums, as well as to bring awareness to the grassroots movements of MMIWG2S+ and MMEIP.

The exhibition featured a delicate balance between subjective and objective artworks intended to guide the viewers through personal stories of grief and loss, but also through the collective strength and empowerment of Indigenous Peoples in relation to the movements. Viewers were encouraged to seek value in Indigenous voices relevant to the issues that impact the people and communities directly, and to connect with the stories, teachings, and people behind the artworks.

Truth and reconciliation through art serves as a powerful tool for fostering understanding and empathy among diverse communities and bridging gaps that may exist due to historical injustices and cultural divides. Exhibits such as these provide a platform for marginalized voices to be heard and for stories to be shared, amplifying Indigenous perspectives, and promoting healing on both individual and societal levels. By engaging with art, individuals were invited to confront uncomfortable truths, challenge stereotypes, and envision a future built on mutual respect and cooperation. The duration of the exhibit, which was showcased prominently in the foyer of a government building until the end of May, heightened its visibility and impact. This allocation of space in an atypical setting further underscored its significance.

The MMEIP Taskforce continued its work in 2023 by hosting gatherings throughout the region in February, as well as by supporting a March press conference in Edmonton. The gatherings were hosted by Athabasca Tribal Council (ATC) and supported by the MMEIP Taskforce in each Nation across the region. Beginning in Janvier and concluding in Fort Chipewyan, the intent of the gatherings was to honour those who lost their lives to

violence or have experienced exploitation. The gatherings were opportunities to offer and receive support for an issue that is often left unspoken. As Chief Adam, President of ATC once said, "How we solve this has to come from the community. The people have to start speaking about these issues." Chief Adam further iterated, "When you don't say anything, these problems will just fester and fester and fester. They'll continue and the mental health issues will be unresolved." (Fort McMurray Today, May 9, 2023)

National Day of Awareness for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls

Red Dress Day | May 5

On May 5, the National Day of Awareness for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, also known as Red Dress Day, the Municipality partnered with ATC to host a community-wide Solidarity Walk and Gathering in support of MMEIP. This day holds profound importance as a day of remembrance, advocacy, and action. It serves as a solemn reminder of the staggering rates of violence faced by Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirit individuals in Canada and around the world. By wearing red on May 5, or by displaying red dresses in public spaces, individuals and communities raise awareness about the systemic issues contributing to this crisis, including colonialism, racism, and socio-economic disparities. Red Dress Day also honours the lives of those who have been lost or gone missing, while calling for justice, accountability, and concrete measures to end violence against Indigenous women and girls.

Approximately 500 people took part in the walk and gathering, which began in ceremony at Borealis Park. Participants then walked a designated route from Borealis Park to kiyām Community Park, where a public art activation took place. Those participating in the day were invited by local Métis artist, Treasure Cooper, to paint their hands red and use them to mark a prepared canvas.



Red Dress Day solidarity walk in downtown Fort McMurray on May 5, 2023 - photo by Nick Vardy and provided by Athabasca Tribal Council

Sections of the canvas were covered in black tape, and once fully revealed, the painting showed a woman screaming in pain while her body was not visible. Cooper shared that the image represented the erasure and invisibility that has surrounded the crisis of missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirit people. The day continued with a gathering and meal held at the Royal Canadian Legion and concluded with remarks from community leaders and those who had been personally impacted by the crisis. A healing circle was hosted for those who required additional support.

Sisters in Spirit Day | October 4

Sisters in Spirit Day also holds profound significance as a day of remembrance and advocacy for missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirit people. This day reminds people of the ongoing crisis of violence and systemic injustices disproportionately affecting

Indigenous women and gender-diverse individuals. It provides an opportunity for communities to honour the lives lost, support grieving families, and demand action from governments and institutions to address the root causes of this violence. Sisters in Spirit Day also amplifies Indigenous voices and calls for systemic change, including improved access to justice, culturally relevant support services, and meaningful engagement with Indigenous communities in developing solutions.

To honour this important day, the Municipality came together in partnership with ATC and the MMEIP Taskforce, to invite all community members to honour the memories of the more than 1,200 missing or murdered Indigenous women and girls across Canada. Held at the Raphael Cree Boat Launch, the community gathering began at sunrise with a sacred fire and concluded with a ceremony, feast, and candlelight vigil. Approximately 100 community members joined together to demonstrate their support.

Call to Action 47 (Doctrine of Discovery and *terra nullius*)

Additions to Reserve

Call to Action 47 calls upon all levels of government to repudiate concepts used to justify European sovereignty over Indigenous Peoples and lands, and to reform laws, government policies, and litigation strategies that continue to rely on such concepts. One such mechanism to repudiate these concepts are Additions to Reserves (ATR).

On February 7, 2023, Council approved a historic agreement with the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation (ACFN); the signing of a Municipal Services Agreement (MSA) with ACFN for the Acden lot. The Agreement is a significant step towards the creation of the first urban reserve in Fort McMurray and marks the first time Council has formally entered into an MSA with a First Nation for an ATR. Expanding reserves acknowledges Indigenous sovereignty and land rights, countering the notion of Indigenous lands as “empty” or “available” for European colonization. By increasing the land base for Indigenous communities, governments take steps toward rectifying the historical injustices perpetuated by the Doctrine of Discovery and *terra nullius*, which denied Indigenous Peoples’ inherent rights to their traditional territories.

Furthermore, the ongoing support demonstrated by Municipal Council for ATRs highlights a commitment to reforming government policies and practices that have historically marginalized Indigenous Peoples. By providing more land for reserves, governments contribute to the empowerment and self-determination of Indigenous communities, aligning with the broader goals of reconciliation outlined in the TRC’s Calls to Action.

Protocol Agreements

By establishing relationship agreements, local

governments and Nations are actively working to repudiate harmful colonial doctrines. These agreements recognize the inherent rights of Indigenous Peoples to their traditional territories and acknowledge the need for reconciliation based on mutual respect, partnership, and cooperation. They provide a framework for collaborative decision-making, resource management, and jurisdictional arrangements that respect Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination.

To enhance and support these relationship agreements, the Municipality established the Indigenous Community Capacity Program (ICCP) which provides funding opportunities to local First Nations and Métis communities in Wood Buffalo. Through this program, signed relationship agreements (Protocol Agreements), seek to strengthen relationships to reform laws and policies that perpetuate colonial injustices using the principles of the TRC’s Calls to Action and the framework of United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). Protocol Agreements aim to build trust, understanding, capacity, and solidarity between the Municipality and the 12 Indigenous communities of the region, to foster more meaningful participation and collaboration on joint priorities and various municipal initiatives.

As of the end of 2023, 10 of 12 Indigenous communities had signed and entered into a Protocol Agreement with the Municipality.

Community Identification Committee Policy, Bylaw, Administrative Directive, Interactive Map, and Naming Inventory Review

Policies serve as the legal and regulatory framework through which governments protect and uphold the rights of individuals and communities. Therefore, policy change can play a critical role in promoting equality and addressing systemic inequalities. In recent years there has been a global movement to address the naming and commemoration of individuals that have taken part in advancing

colonialism, misogyny, and discrimination of peoples throughout history. While it is logistically and practically difficult to rename existing streets, it is vital that the process for naming going forward be aligned with Council’s Strategic Plan and include Council’s commitment to truth and reconciliation, and equity and inclusion.

The Community Identification Committee (CIC) is the body responsible for making recommendations to Council for the naming of communities, subdivisions, public facilities, streets, and multi-family projects within the region. The CIC is also responsible for the development of an inventory of street and place names that reflect the past, present, and future of the Municipality. On November 16, 2023, IRR attended a meeting of the CIC to request that the Committee expand on the motion passed at the meeting of October 5, 2023, where a review of the Community Identification System Policy was requested. IRR requested that the scope of the review be expanded to be inclusive of the Interactive Map, the Naming Inventory, the Community Identification System Policy (LDI-010) and Procedure (LDI-010-P01), and the Community Identification Committee Bylaw No. 07/039. The review was expanded to include benchmarking across other municipalities and be conducted through a lens to promote alignment with Council’s 2022-2025 Strategic Plan, and the Municipality’s commitment to truth and reconciliation and equity and inclusion. This work will be undertaken and completed in 2024.

Calls to Action 53 and 55 (National Council for Reconciliation)

Truth and Reconciliation Champions

In the 2022 Annual Update, the Municipality identified broadening the organizational response to truth and reconciliation by implementing an interdepartmental working group. This came to fruition in 2023 with the

formation of the Truth and Reconciliation Champions, which included representatives from across municipal departments. Throughout 2023, key goals and objectives of the Champions continued to advance the Municipality’s commitment to truth and reconciliation and increased organizational accountability and awareness.

Moreover, the development of comprehensive Terms of Reference provided a clear framework for the Champions’ activities and objectives. This document outlined the mandate, roles, and responsibilities of the Champions, ensuring clarity and coherence in their efforts. Also, the alignment of their quarterly meetings with the reporting schedule of Council’s Strategic Plan demonstrated a deliberate approach to integration and coordination. This synchronization facilitated seamless communication and collaboration between the Champions and other municipal initiatives.

Overall, the Champions played a pivotal role in driving progress forward in the Municipality’s path toward reconciliation.

Call to Action 57 (Professional Development in Training for Public Servants)

Recognizing that one of the Municipality’s key assets is its staff, professional development offers an additional avenue where profound change can be achieved. Many staff interact daily with the public, Indigenous Peoples, and citizens in rural and Indigenous communities. That is why Call to Action 57 remains both a high-ranking priority and area for growth and achievement.

In 2023, IRR and LEARN worked together to offer additional training and professional development opportunities, beyond the Indigenous Awareness training that is mandatory for all staff. A land-based learning opportunity was planned in 2022 and was formally offered in 2023. Facilitated by Elders

and Knowledge Keepers, the Indigenous Land Connection learning opportunity led participants through a traditional plant walk, ceremony and protocol teaching, and a drum teaching.

Dene Hand Games was another hands-on, experiential training opportunity offered by IRR and Learn. In August 2023, three sessions were hosted and were facilitated by a local youth hand games athlete.

In addition to partnering with Learn, the IRR department also recognized the potential within municipal staff, and so, turned the focus of the annual Truth and Reconciliation Challenge inwards in 2023. The Challenge adopted a strong theme of personal accountability and responsibility as Treaty People and mobilized the Truth and Reconciliation Champions to disseminate information and encourage action and participation.

Truth and Reconciliation Challenge | September 2023

Beginning in 2021, the Truth and Reconciliation Challenge has become an annual initiative designed by IRR to raise awareness about the history of Indigenous Peoples in Canada and the legacy of Indian Residential Schools. In previous years, the Challenge has been available to the public; however, in 2023, the initiative focused internally, encouraging Municipal staff and leadership to undertake a personal commitment to reconciliation.

With input from local Indigenous communities and Elders, the 2023 Truth and Reconciliation Challenge was delivered during each week of September, leading up to the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation on September 30. Each week was theme-based, providing foundational information and activities intended to create space for dialogue and personal reflection. The final week of the Challenge focused on honouring survivors. During that week, all departments were provided the resources to create their own

personal message to survivors through a heart garden activity. Heart gardens honour residential school survivors and their families, as well as the legacy of the TRC. Each heart represented the memory of a child lost to the residential school system, and the act of planting represented the participant's commitment to reconciliation. A local Elder and Knowledge Keeper guided the planting ceremony, which took place in front of the Jubilee building.

Call to Action 66 (Youth Programs)

Youth are vital to truth and reconciliation; they bring fresh perspectives and a determination to confront the past. Their energy and idealism drive intergenerational dialogue and challenge entrenched narratives. By engaging youth in these processes, we provide space for growth and work towards a more just and inclusive society. Their involvement is essential for genuine healing and lasting reconciliation.

Recognizing a significant gap in opportunities for Indigenous students to engage with local governance, the Municipality took proactive steps in partnership with CAREERS Next Generation to address this by creating a dedicated summer student position within the IRR department. This initiative not only acknowledged the importance of the voices of Indigenous students, but also actively promoted opportunities for Indigenous youth to gain firsthand experience in municipal operations.

The goal of continued partnerships with organizations like CAREERS Next Generation is to provide valuable opportunities for employment and skill development, which can enhance future career paths and economic independence. Additionally, the inclusion of students in municipal programming for IRR initiatives serves to foster cultural pride and connection to Indigenous heritage by incorporating traditional knowledge and practices into the work experience.

Calls to Action 79 and 82 (Commemoration)

National Day for Truth and Reconciliation Memorial Walk and Gathering | September 28

Commemoration remains a key component of the Municipality's response to truth and reconciliation. In collaboration with community partners, a memorial walk and gathering was held on September 28, 2023. Typically commemorated on September 30, the alternative date was selected to be inclusive of school and youth participation.

The gathering began at kiyām Community Park with a prayer and the inaugural raising of the Survivors' flag. This was a poignant moment as the Survivors' flag holds immense significance as a symbol of resilience, strength, and solidarity for survivors of trauma and adversity within Indigenous communities. Its colors and design carry deep cultural and historical meanings, representing the journey

of survival and healing from intergenerational traumas such as residential schools, forced assimilation policies, and other forms of colonial violence.

The raised Survivor's flag in Wood Buffalo serves as a visible reminder of the enduring spirit of Indigenous Peoples and their right for healing, justice, recognition, and reconciliation. It honours the experiences and resilience of local survivors, while reminding us all of our individual and collective commitment to truth and reconciliation, to building a future based on mutual respect and understanding.

Calls to Action 87, 88 and 91 (Sports and Reconciliation)

In the 2022 Annual Update, Administration recommended that Call to Action 91 be formally adopted by Council to reflect the deep involvement that local Indigenous leaders and communities had in the engagement, participation, planning and



Memorial Walk and Gathering in downtown Fort McMurray to recognize the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation on Sept. 28, 2023

execution of a successful Arctic Winter Games (AWG 2023). The host society showed a commitment to reconciliation throughout the Games, which was noticeably interwoven throughout the week-long, winter, multi-sport event. Included were cultural galas, a cultural feast, and pop-up exhibitions at MacDonald Island Park which focused on raising awareness of the history of the residential school system and MMEIP.

The 2023 Arctic Winter Games host society strove to leave a legacy for the support and education of the rich local Indigenous culture and Peoples in the region. The path forward includes honouring and highlighting Indigenous athletes and sharing their story, bringing this call to action to a regional level. In recognition of this and in response to Call to Action 87, the Municipality, through the IRR department, and in collaboration with local Indigenous communities, will seek to provide public education that recognizes and honours the sporting achievements and ongoing contributions of local First Nation and Métis communities. The Municipality is committed to carrying the legacy of the AWG forward by hosting the Indigenous Sport Gallery in the future.

To further support Call to Action 88, the Municipality aims to develop a plan of action to pursue federal and provincial grant opportunities to provide assistance to Indigenous athlete sporting activities, as well as foster excellence in the field of Indigenous athletics.

Calls to Action 92 (Business and Reconciliation)

Economic reconciliation is an area of focus within Council's 2022-2025 Strategic Plan, which highlights the building of partnerships with Indigenous businesses, communities, and leadership. As a result, one of the goals of the IRR department is that of stimulating economic growth to ensure equitable

opportunities across all sectors in the region.

IRR has actively participated in the recently established Indigenous Economic Action Committee, in collaboration with members from Fort McMurray Wood Buffalo Economic Development & Tourism (FMWBEDT), and Indigenous business owners and leaders. The Committee aims to address the economic disparities faced by Indigenous businesses in the region.

In addition, IRR worked with the Federal government to establish a Wood Buffalo economic roundtable to serve as a platform for collaboration between regional Indigenous and non-Indigenous businesses. This initiative is geared towards driving economic growth and facilitates meaningful dialogue and cooperation, ultimately enhancing prosperity opportunities. The annual meeting also enabling the sharing of information about available services or grants, while highlighting those organizations that can provide further resources to enhance economic equity.

Call to Action 92 also states that skills-based training in intercultural competency, conflict resolution, human rights, and anti-racism form part of the principles of reconciliation for the corporate sector. To that end, IRR has worked collaboratively with the Equity and Inclusion Office and LEARN to implement Allyship Training within the Municipality. Open to all municipal staff, this training represented a pivotal step in cultivating a more inclusive workplace environment. The training provided participants with the tools to actively engage as allies and demonstrated the profound significance of allyship in fostering understanding and unity. By prompting discussions on an individual's role in reconciliation, particularly in client-facing positions, the training ensured each staff member comprehended their contribution to advancing equity and inclusion.

THE PATHWAY FORWARD: 2024

Administration recommends formally adopting Call to Action 45, putting particular emphasis on renewing or establishing Treaty relationships based on principles of mutual recognition, mutual respect, and shared responsibility for maintaining those relationships into the future. With 2024 being the 125th Anniversary of the signing of Treaty 8, support for this call to action will reaffirm the need to raise further awareness about the Treaties. In addition, it will raise awareness of our personal accountability and responsibility as Treaty people, recognizing and understanding that we are all Treaty people.

Call to Action 45 encapsulates the community-specific Protocol Agreements and reaffirms the need to repudiate concepts used to justify European sovereignty over Indigenous lands and Peoples while formally implementing UNDRIP as the framework for reconciliation. Furthermore, the Alberta Municipalities recommends all municipalities adopt or undertake the work associated with this call to action.

Administration also recommends formally adopting Call to Action 69, which encourages libraries to commit more resources to public education and programming focused on residential schools. Alberta Municipalities recommends that municipalities partner with libraries to host speaker events and sharing circles, as well as promote literature that will increase awareness about the history and legacy of residential schools. This work is already happening in partnership with the Wood Buffalo Regional Library through the *It's Time to Read* Book Club. The book club features the works and voices of Indigenous authors to increase understanding and awareness of Indigenous culture, history, and current issues. The program has brought in speakers and expanded to a three-part film series in Summer 2023.

Lastly, in line with the Alberta Municipalities recommendations, Administration advises the adoption of Call to Action 93, which calls for creating information kits for newcomers to reflect the history of Indigenous Peoples, including information about the Treaties and the history of residential schools. The Municipality currently offers online learning modules, which are open to the public, that provide educational awareness to the broader community. Further to this, Administration recommends exploring relationships with agencies such as the Wood Buffalo Local Immigration Partnership and the Multicultural Association of Wood Buffalo to foster a deeper understanding of the history of Indigenous ways of knowing and being among newcomers to the region.

There is unwavering dedication and support from every department within the Municipality to further the 30 Calls to Action already adopted by Council. The Municipality remains committed to advancing reconciliation by putting words into action through meaningful and positive engagement, advocacy, and awareness campaigns. The path toward reconciliation continues to be a priority, as it acknowledges historical truths, promotes healing and understanding, and paves the way for a more equitable and inclusive future for Wood Buffalo.



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